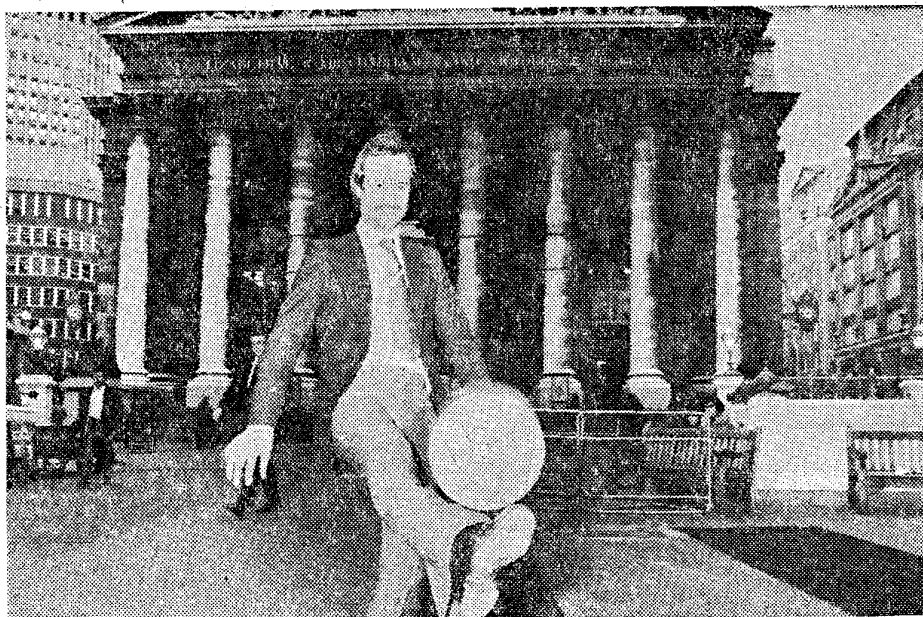


Mead won his duel and lost illusions



Picture by Tom Smith

Keith Mead has a kick outside the Royal Exchange

KEITH MEAD, company director skipper of Wycombe Wanderers and a distinguished amateur international, works in his city office this morning with half an ear cocked for a phone call from a professional club.

It is tempting to see Mead, who is on the wrong side of his 29th birthday, as a new Walter Mitty. Tempting—but unfair.

Before television's most hilarious knock-about team, the F.A. Cup draw committee, placed Wycombe alongside Middlesbrough and thrust Mead into a 180 minute duel with Young England star David Mills, such stirrings of ambition were well under control.

But, as Mead says now, "I went into the Middlesbrough games feeling quite a bit of awe. I knew that even if my concentration were one hundred per cent I still had a hell of a job on my hands—and the odds were

that Mills would get the better of me.

"But he didn't score. I contained him over two games—and this is a player Don Revie was raving about recently.

"Yes, it has made me think very deeply about having a go at becoming a professional. My experiences against 'Boro must make me feel that I have a chance of doing something."

In fact, his experiences—and those of the Wimbledon and Altrincham players—over the last few days have put dramatic question marks against First Division standards. And the doubts are not so much about skill, though that does remain an area of concern, as motivation and psychology.

"Quite frankly," says Mead, "I would not put money on Middlesbrough to win the Isthmian League. On the face of it, that may sound absurd. But the thing that has struck us so powerfully at Wycombe is the incredible difference in Middlesbrough's performances at home and away.

Smoke screen

"The baffling fact is that 'Boro, a team who work for each other and rely in no way on the star system, just couldn't work for each other and motivate themselves in the big one—their first F.A. Cup round of the season—O.K., O.K., we know all about the pitch. But honestly, that's a smoke screen.

"They never had a winning attitude, they never harassed us or did anything, apart from a few fouls to try to break our rhythm.

"And we were the amateurs, the guys who were supposed to be hanging on by our fingernails.

"At Middlesbrough the other night the former England trainer, Harold Shepherdson, came up to us and said: 'You boys do know about applying pressure, don't you?' He seemed really surprised."

For Mead it has been clearly a period of sharp reassessment of his own ability. The ease with which he stifled the menace of Mills—I can't recall the Under-23 international getting a meaningful kick at Wycombe—has pushed him into serious thoughts about a late run at a professional career.